



**Important**

**Information**

# **Preventing Birth Defects**



**for Michigan**

**Families**

## **What is a Birth Defect?**

A birth defect is an abnormal condition that occurs before or at the time of birth. Birth defects can cause physical and mental problems that require special medical care or therapy. Some, like Down syndrome and sickle cell anemia, are caused by genetic factors. Other birth defects are caused by certain drugs or chemicals. The causes of many birth defects are still a mystery.

## **Did You Know?**

Birth defects are a serious problem. They are the leading cause of death in children under one year of age. About one in 33 babies is born with a birth defect. Many people believe that birth defects only happen to other people. Birth defects can and do happen in any family. About 8,000 babies in Michigan are born with birth defects each year. Defects of the heart and limbs are the most common.

## **What is the Good News?**

The good news is that researchers are finding ways to prevent and treat some birth defects.

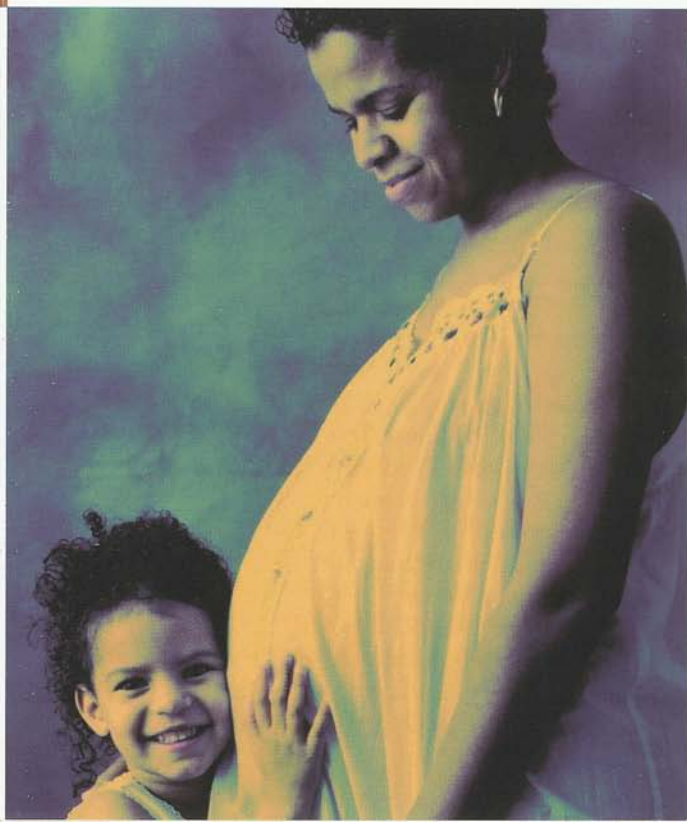
Genes that may cause birth defects are being found every day, providing hope for new treatments and cures. Genetic counseling can provide parents with information about risks based on family history, age, ethnic or racial background, or other factors.

Better health care for mothers with chronic medical conditions can improve their chances of having healthy babies. Immunization prevents mothers from getting infections such as German measles that can harm an unborn baby.



- Don't handle soiled cat litter — it may spread toxoplasmosis (an infection that can harm unborn babies).
- Don't use hot tubs and saunas right before conception or in early pregnancy.
- Avoid exposure to toxic household substances such as insecticides, lead, mercury, and strong chemicals.
- Avoid unnecessary x-rays.
- Get prenatal care early in pregnancy. Keep every appointment.

- Get to your ideal weight and exercise regularly before you get pregnant.
- Eat a variety of foods with plenty of grain products, vegetables and fruits.
- Practice safer sex by using condoms if you are concerned about the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STD).
- Wash hands often to reduce the spread of infection — especially when caring for young children.
- Don't smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs.
- Don't eat undercooked meat. If you eat Great Lakes fish, follow the guidelines in the Michigan Fish Advisory available with fishing licenses. Call: 1-800-648-6942 for a free copy.





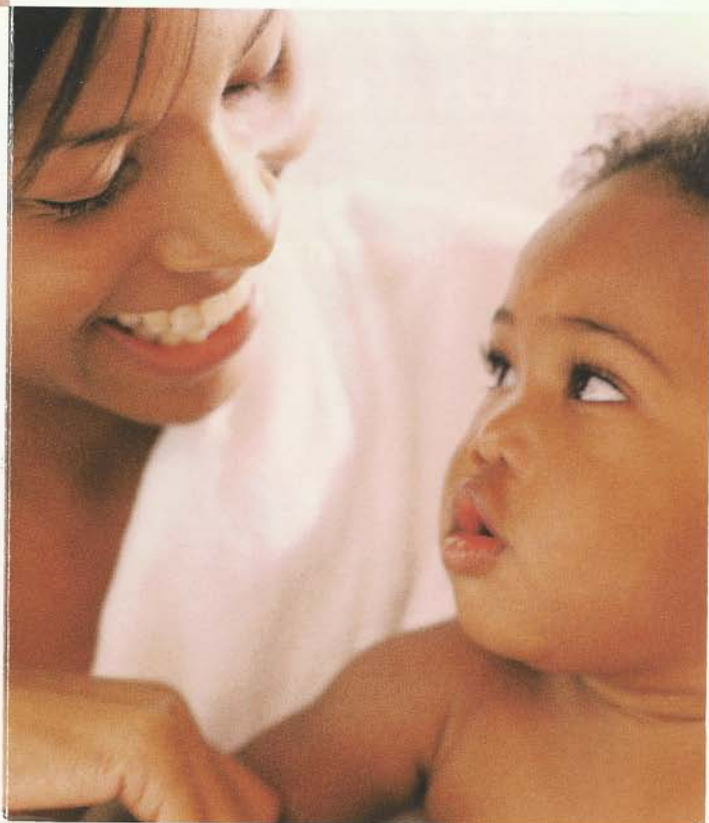


- Know your family history and tell your health care provider if you have a child or other family member with a birth defect, genetic disease, or developmental disability.
- Find out if medicines you take (both over-the-counter and prescription) are safe during pregnancy.
- Ask if you should avoid any substances at work that might be harmful to an unborn baby.
- Tell your doctor about any medical problems you have. Take good care of yourself and follow his or her advice. If you have a condition such as diabetes, seizures, or lupus, talk to your specialist about planning for pregnancy. Choose a health care team and hospital that has experience with high-risk pregnancies.

### **What Steps Can Women Take for Healthier Babies?**

Not all birth defects can be prevented, but you can increase the chance of having a healthy baby. Many birth defects happen very early in pregnancy. Sometimes they occur before a woman even knows she is pregnant. About half of all pregnancies in Michigan are not planned. Therefore, all Michigan women of childbearing age need to think ahead and follow these tips for a healthier baby:

- Take a vitamin pill with 400 micrograms (400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day. It helps to prevent some kinds of birth defects.
- Have regular medical and dental check-ups.





## Did You Know?

The U.S. Public Health Service recommends that all females who could become pregnant should take 400 micrograms (400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day to help prevent some types of serious birth defects. Folic acid is a B-vitamin that can reduce the risk of birth defects involving the brain and spine.

Newborn screening, special care after birth, and new medical treatments can help babies with birth defects live longer and healthier lives.

The Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) keeps track of how often and where birth defects occur in the state. The Birth Defects Registry Follow-up Program can tell you about services for children with birth defects that may help you or someone you know.

Call: (517) 335-8887

E-mail: [BDRFollowup@state.mi.us](mailto:BDRFollowup@state.mi.us)

Visit: [www.mdch.state.mi.us/dch/clcf/hdp/birthdefects.htm](http://www.mdch.state.mi.us/dch/clcf/hdp/birthdefects.htm)

## Want to Know More?

Ask your health care provider or local health department about planning for a healthy baby.

March of Dimes Resource Center

Call: **1-888-663-4637 (toll-free)**

Visit: [www.modimes.org](http://www.modimes.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Call: **1-888-232-6789 (toll-free)**

Visit: [www.cdc.gov/nceh/cddh/BD/bdpghome.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/cddh/BD/bdpghome.htm)

Michigan Teratogen Information Service

Call: **1-877-52-MITIS (toll-free)** if you have questions about medicines or other exposures during pregnancy.

MDCH Birth Defects Registry Follow-up Program

Call: (517) 335-8887

E-mail: [BDRFollowup@state.mi.us](mailto:BDRFollowup@state.mi.us)

Visit: [www.mdch.state.mi.us/dch/clcf/hdp/birthdefects.htm](http://www.mdch.state.mi.us/dch/clcf/hdp/birthdefects.htm)

This publication was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number U50/CCU516053 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

*Michigan Department  
of Community Health*



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MDCH is an Equal Opportunity Employer, Services and Programs Provider.  
100,000 printed at 7.5 cents each with a total cost of \$7,500.

DCH-0989